

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, MCPHERSON SQUARE
BRANCH
601 East Indiana Avenue
Philadelphia
Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

HABS PA-6759
PA-6759

PHOTOGRAPHS

WRITTEN HISTORICAL AND DESCRIPTIVE DATA

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY
National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240-0001

HISTORIC AMERICAN BUILDINGS SURVEY

FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA, McPHERSON SQUARE BRANCH

HABS No. PA-6759

Location: 601 East Indiana Ave (center of McPherson Square facing south/southwest), Philadelphia, Philadelphia County, Pennsylvania

Present Owner: City of Philadelphia

Present Occupant: Free Library of Philadelphia

Present Use: branch library

Significance: McPherson Square was one of twenty-five branch libraries constructed between 1904 and 1930 by the Free Library of Philadelphia using a \$1.5 million grant from the Carnegie Corporation. Andrew Carnegie's public library construction grants were a major impetus for the growth of these institutions throughout the country. Philadelphia was second only to New York City in the size of the Carnegie grant it received and the number of branch libraries constructed. Each jurisdiction receiving Carnegie library funds was responsible for providing a site and operating expenses equal to ten percent of the cost of construction. Prior to receiving the Carnegie funds in 1903, branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia (founded 1891) were housed in a variety of preexisting structures. The Carnegie library construction campaign provided twenty-five purpose-built branch libraries for the City of Philadelphia, each designed according to the latest standards of library professionalism and using fashionable, but conservative, architectural forms and motifs.

McPherson Square was the nineteenth Carnegie branch library opened by the Free Library of Philadelphia. The construction contract was awarded by the Free Library Board of Trustees Carnegie Fund Committee on December 9, 1915 and the branch opened to the public on May 25, 1917. Because this branch was built in the middle of an existing city park the site was acquired by the Free Library trustees much earlier, on April 9, 1904. The McPherson Square branch was designed by the prominent Philadelphia firm of Wilson Eyre & McIlvaine in the form of an elegant domed Palladian villa.

PART I. HISTORICAL INFORMATION

1. Date of erection: 1915-1917, opened May 25, 1917
2. Architect: Wilson Eyre & McIlvaine
3. Original and subsequent owners/uses: Free Library of Philadelphia branch library, 1917 to present.
4. Builder, contractor, suppliers:¹
General contract – F.A. Havens & Co. - \$42,912 (+\$400 for extra terra cotta work)
Heating – Roberts Leinau - \$4,799
Electrical – J.F. Buchanan & Co - \$1,100
5. Original plans and construction: A pastel sketch dated 1913 and signed by Wilson Eyre shows the McPherson Square branch library as a cruciform-plan domed structure in the center of the park.² As built, the library is similar but modified in plan to be closer to the T-shape favored for Philadelphia's branch libraries in this period. Construction commenced during the winter of 1915-16 and was completed by early 1917.
6. Alterations and additions: The library largely retains its original appearance on the exterior, except for the removal of the balustrade around the dome and replacement of the mission tile roof with asphalt shingles. A low brick addition is located at the end of the rear ell. It had large openings that are now covered and its use is unknown. The interior spaces are largely intact but with changes in shelving, lighting and other fixtures.

B. Historical Context:

During the nineteenth century most libraries in the United States were private or available only to subscribers. Starting in the late nineteenth century, many cities began to found "free library" systems to provide educational material and services to a wider array of citizens, particularly the burgeoning immigrant population. The Free Library of Philadelphia was founded in 1891 and proceeded to establish a central library and a network of neighborhood branches. Despite ambitious goals, however, these libraries remained rather modest affairs housed in rented space and utilizing mainly donated collections and volunteer staffing.

During this same period the library construction philanthropy of wealthy industrialist Andrew Carnegie would have a profound effect on both the development of professional library standards and the evolution of the building type. In January 1903, the Free Library of Philadelphia received a \$1.5 million grant from Andrew Carnegie and

¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (29 November 1915).

² Wilson Eyre, "Proposed Improvements to McPherson Square, (large pastel sketch)" (1913) Wilson Eyre Collection, Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA.

the Carnegie Corporation to build thirty branch libraries.³ Carnegie had been engaged in library building philanthropy since 1886, but the program was expanded to jurisdictions outside of his personal and business spheres only in 1898. Carnegie library historian George Bobinski calls this later period the “wholesale phase” of Carnegie’s library philanthropy. From 1898 to 1919, he gave over \$39 million to 1,406 communities. The unprecedented scale of this effort contrasts with the “retail phase” between 1886 and 1898 when Carnegie donated \$1.8 million to six communities.⁴ The \$1.5 million gift to Philadelphia’s fledgling free library system was quite generous. Only New York City, which received a \$5.2 million grant for sixty-six libraries in 1899, built more branches using Carnegie funds. The next largest grants went to Baltimore and Cleveland; each city built fourteen libraries.⁵

In Philadelphia there was a delay while the various government agencies worked out a mechanism to legally accept and administer such unprecedented largesse. According to Bobinski, “the Pennsylvania State legislature had to approve an act authorizing the Philadelphia city council to enter into contracts with the trustees of the public library so that the arrangements necessary for receiving the Carnegie gift could be carried into effect.”⁶ After a year of bureaucratic maneuvering, the state legislature finally passed the law enabling the city to officially accept the gift. The final step before the Free Library could proceed was an ordinance approving this arrangement passed by Mayor John Weaver in January 1904. John Thomson quickly sent a letter to James Bertram, Carnegie’s personal secretary and gatekeeper for the library philanthropy program expressing his relief that the Free Library could move forward with branch construction:

I have the pleasure of informing you that I have this morning received from the Clerk of Councils official notice that the Mayor has signed the Ordinance accepting Mr. Carnegie’s splendid gift to the City of Philadelphia. The matter has been one of great anxiety. . . . Arrangements are on foot to accept four or five sites and it is hoped that the preliminary arrangements for locating the system of Branch Libraries, made possible by Mr. Carnegie’s munificence, will be put in active motion at once. . . . I think we shall be able very rapidly to show our appreciation of what Mr. Carnegie has put it in our power to do.⁷

³ While the original grant stipulated funding for 30 libraries at \$50,000 each, rising construction costs caused the number to be scaled back in 1918. For the remaining branches, the Carnegie funds provided only part of the construction cost with the city or neighborhood groups making up the difference. See letter from Librarian John Ashhurst to James Bertram, Secretary, Carnegie Corporation officially changing the total number of Carnegie branches to “25 or 26,” (11 October 1918), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁴ Bobinski 13-14.

⁵ Bobinski 229, 231.

⁶ Bobinski 44.

⁷ Letter, John Thomson to James Bertram (13 January 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

The year-long delay in officially accepting the gift gave the Free Library time to quietly prepare to construct new branch buildings and move rapidly once approval came. Carnegie did not specify architectural designs or review plans at this time, but he did express a strong preference that the branch libraries include lecture rooms.⁸ In a letter officially accepting Carnegie's gift, Free Library Board of Trustees President Joseph G. Rosengarten noted that the Trustees "concur[red] fully" with his lecture room suggestion and planned to expand the already successful Free Library lecture program.⁹

Beyond a general desire for new branch buildings and an interest in including lecture rooms, it is not clear what guidelines or models informed the Free Library as they developed a fairly consistent branch library plan for their city. When Philadelphia received its Carnegie grant there was no official design review by Carnegie or his staff. By 1908 James Bertram, Carnegie's secretary, had to approve the building plans for all new grants. The Carnegie publication "Notes on the Erection of Library Buildings" [sic.] was first issued in 1911 by Bertram.¹⁰ While the Philadelphia branch library designs progressed independent of Carnegie design oversight, it appears both were developing simultaneously and in harmony with the latest precepts in library planning.

The Board of Trustees of the Free Library formed a Carnegie Fund Committee in March 1904 to oversee the details of this ambitious branch building effort. In response to a request from the Carnegie Fund Committee for instructions on how to select architects, the Board of Trustees implemented an ad hoc system. They sought to avoid the expense and complication of holding competitions so instead proposed to appoint architects as branch sites were chosen. Selection seems to have been based on reputation and personal contacts, with some architects asking to be considered as work on the branches proceeded. The written record is thin on this point, but it is apparent that librarian John Thomson and assistant librarian John Ashhurst were instrumental in this process. John Thomson served as secretary of the Carnegie Fund Committee and the Free Library's leading staff member on all matters. Ashhurst's assistant librarian position was specifically created by the Board of Trustees "in order to undertake part of the very heavy extra work that would now be involved in carrying out the Andrew Carnegie Branch Library Building scheme."¹¹

In the interest of moving quickly to open new branch buildings, projects on donated or city-owned property typically were launched first. Later branches were built on a mix of donated and purchased sites to ensure even distribution across the city. At the first meeting of the Carnegie Fund Committee on April 9, 1904, a motion was

⁸ "Carnegie Offers \$1,500,000 to City," *Philadelphia Times*, 7 January 1903, clipping in Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

⁹ Letter, J. G. Rosengarten to Andrew Carnegie, (5 March 1904), Carnegie Corporation Correspondence microfilm, Reel 25, Special Collections, Butler Library, Columbia University, New York.

¹⁰ Abigail Van Slyck. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-36.

¹¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Board of Trustees Meeting Minutes, (12 February 1904).

approved to build a branch library in McPherson Park.¹² As a city-owned site with a existing branch library in a repurposed house, it was a natural choice for new Carnegie-funded building. In 1891, land and a circa 1805 house, known as Stouton or the Webster Mansion, were sold to the City of Philadelphia by the Webster family for use as a park. The McPherson Square Branch of the Free Library opened in Stouton on July 5, 1898. In 1900 a one-story, 42 by 42 foot addition was added to the house.¹³

In April 1904 the Board of Trustees appointed the firm of Cope and Stewardson architects for the McPherson Square branch, which was to be the fourth Carnegie branch in the system. In November, the Carnegie Fund Committee instructed the architects to choose a location for the library within McPherson Park. Progress on the McPherson Square branch stalled, however, as others moved forward. Almost immediately managers of the City Parks Association raised objections about locating branch libraries and other public facilities in city squares. They felt that it was a dangerous trend to take away open space for buildings and they hoped that the Free Library would reconsider. They recognized that the fact the prior location of branch libraries in existing historic houses in both McPherson Square and Vernon Park (in Germantown) set a precedent for constructing new Carnegie-funded buildings at these sites, although they disagreed with this approach.¹⁴

Conflict with the surrounding community of Kensington also seems to have delayed progress on this branch. Probably because of the delays, Cope and Stewardson were reassigned to design the Chestnut Hill branch, which was dedicated in January 1909.¹⁵ The large working class population of textile mill workers in the immediate neighborhood objected to accepting a gift from Andrew Carnegie due to his anti-labor practices. Another political issue was the exact placement of the library on the site – at the edge or in the center replacing the Webster Mansion. The Aramingo Society of Historical Research urged preservation of the historic house as the only remaining landmark of the neighborhood's former agricultural history. The Free Library Board of Trustees and its Carnegie Fund Committee initially favored siting the new library on the edge of the park along Indiana Avenue or F Street and preservation of the house. The 1905 *Annual Report* of the Free Library noted:

It is hoped that at no distant time the city may permit the erection of a new branch library building . . . This building could be placed on the edge of McPherson Park, either on Indiana Avenue or on F Street. The present building known as the Webster Mansion need not be removed. If the

¹² Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (9 April 1904).

¹³ Information about neighborhood resistance was located at www.librarycompany.org/collections/prints/archive/apr2007.htm , a Curator's Favorites description of the Webster Family Photographic Negative Collection; "The Latest News in Real Estate," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 20 April 1900, 11.

¹⁴ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (25 April 1904), 8; Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (25 November 1904); "Oppose Buildings in City Squares," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 29 April 1904, 16.

¹⁵ See HABS No. PA-6750 for the Chestnut Hill Branch Library photographs and historical report.

additions erected by free library are removed, so much of the old mansion remains is preserved, it will make a capital summer resting place for those using the park, and an excellent home for the park janitor, and other purposes of the character.¹⁶

The 1909 *Annual Report* again mentions that “by placing a properly equipped Carnegie Building on the edge of the Park, instead of in the centre [sic.], much improved service and a great benefit to the public would ensue.”¹⁷

The debate continued to drag on for several years, although by 1910 the Trustees had shifted positions to urge removal of the mansion, although the plan was still to build the new library at the edge of the park. They determined that steep paths required to access the branch in its current location were treacherous, particularly in bad weather.¹⁸ In 1912, some exasperation began to show even in the formal annual report of the library. The report declared it “almost indispensable” that the present building be demolished and a new branch building with “more floor space and better facilities” be erected “at as early a time as can be arranged.”¹⁹ The report mentioned awaiting formal approval from the City to replace the Webster Mansion, and carefully noted that the Free Library appreciated being able to use the structure as a branch in the past.

Finally in 1913 plans began to move forward for a new McPherson Square branch library. After lobbying by the McPherson Park Improvement Association, the City Council appropriated \$5,000 for improving the lights, sidewalks and other park fittings in preparation for the new library.²⁰ Prominent local architect Wilson Eyre, Jr. (1858-1944) was chosen to design the McPherson Square branch library. Eyre’s name had been entered into the list of prospective branch library architects in September 1905.²¹ The library was designed during his partnership with John Gilbert McIlvaine as the firm of Wilson Eyre and McIlvaine (firm 1911-1939).

The McPherson Square Branch is the only library known to have been designed by Eyre or McIlvaine. Eyre was the more prominent of the two partners. He had a national reputation as a proponent of the Arts and Crafts Movement and English-influenced residential design. Eyre was born in Italy to American parents and spent his childhood there. His architectural training included a brief enrollment at MIT and a variety of apprenticeships starting in 1877. Eyre was particularly admired for his rendering skills and he widely published his sketches and designs, especially as founding editor of *House & Garden* magazine. He went into practice with McIlvaine in 1911 and the younger architect retained the firm name of Wilson Eyre and McIlvaine until 1939. J. Gilbert McIlvaine (1880-1939) was a Philadelphia native and graduate of the University

¹⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Tenth Annual Report* (1905), 18.

¹⁷ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Fourteenth Annual Report* (1909), 23.

¹⁸ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Fifteenth Annual Report* (1910), 25.

¹⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Seventeenth Annual Report* (1912), 28.

²⁰ “Wish to Improve Park,” *Philadelphia Inquirer* 14 October 1913, 3.

²¹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (29 September 1905).

of Pennsylvania in 1903. Like his partner, McIlvaine was active in the American Institute of Architects, the T-Square Club, and the Arts & Crafts Guild of Philadelphia.²²

Initially the branch library was described as a \$40,000 brick structure with terra cotta trimmings and an auditorium with seating for 500.²³ A branch library with an auditorium that large would seem to correspond to a 1913 sketch by Wilson Eyre showing a cruciform plan domed structure in McPherson Square. Here the library has longer wings, particularly at the rear.

Even reduced in size, the domed Neoclassical design for McPherson Square contradicted some of the latest recommendations of the Carnegie Corporation on library design while remaining true to the typical Philadelphia branch library form. Bertram's oversight of library designs after 1908 for new grantees was motivated mainly by distrust of architects and what he saw as a pervasive problem of expensive designs that drove local library building committees over budget. Bertram was particularly interested in eliminating the trend for high domes, classical porticoes, and grand staircases in early Carnegie libraries that he deemed wasteful.²⁴ The typical branch form promoted by the Free Library did happen conform to many of Bertram's ideals, even if they did not quite match any of the suggested floorplans, or in the case of McPherson Square, avoid the superfluous architectural flourish of a dome. As described by architectural historian Abigail Van Slyck:

The ideal Carnegie library was a one-story rectangular building with a small vestibule leading directly to a single large room; where necessary, this room was subdivided by low bookcases that supplemented the bookshelves placed around its perimeter. . . In addition to book storage, this room provided reading areas for adults and children and facilities for the distribution of books. The basement had a lecture room, a heating plant, and "conveniences" for staff and patrons.²⁵

Philadelphia branches followed Bertram's preference for placing windows six feet above the floor level to allow shelves to be placed underneath. Their open plan also was compatible with the recommendation that small libraries be arranged to allow one librarian to see the entire space. It appears that the Philadelphia branches and the Carnegie Corporation recommendations were developing simultaneously and in harmony with the latest precepts in library planning.

The McPherson Square branch design did make some concessions to budgetary concerns in addition to a reduced size from the 1913 sketches. The classical detailing is

²² McIlvaine, John Gilbert," and "Eyre, Wilson, Jr.," in Roger Moss and Sandra Tatman, *Biographical Dictionary of Philadelphia Architects, 1700-1930*. New York: G.K. Hall & Company, 1984), 520-521, 253-261. Profiles of Eyre and McIlvaine also were accessed at www.philadelphiabuildings.org.

²³ "Another Library Building Planned," *Philadelphia Inquirer* 5 October 1913, 8.

²⁴ Abigail Van Slyck. *Free to All: Carnegie Libraries & American Culture, 1890-1920*. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 35-36.

²⁵ Van Slyck, 37.

rendered in polychrome terra cotta, a much less expensive decorative material than carved stone. The structure is also stuccoed brick rather than stone masonry. Perhaps these changes account for the longer than average design period. The 1914 Annual Report mentioned that the preliminary drawings were underway. It also noted that \$5,000 was allocated for grading improvements to the park in December 1914. It is not clear whether these are additional funds or the same appropriation mentioned earlier.²⁶

Regardless, construction costs were rising and \$50,000 was no longer enough for construction of a proper branch library, even with design changes. In April 1915 the Carnegie Fund Committee recommended that the Board of Trustees allocate \$60,000 each for the next two branches at McPherson Square and Nicetown. At this same meeting a front elevation rendering of the McPherson Square branch was approved by the Committee.²⁷ Also in 1915, the Webster Mansion was demolished to allow construction of the new library. During construction the branch library was relocated to a rented space on the corner of Kensington Avenue and H Street.²⁸

F. A. Havens & Co. received the general construction contract for McPherson Square branch library in December 1915. Havens would receive \$42,912 plus another \$400 "at the suggestion of the architect. . . for extra terra cotta work."²⁹ Roberts Leinaw won the \$4,799 heating contract and J. F. Buchanan & Co. won an \$1,100 contract for the electrical work.

The McPherson Square Branch was opened on May 25, 1917 with "appropriate ceremonies."³⁰ It was the nineteenth Carnegie-funded branch in the Free Library system and its final cost came to \$60,448.77. A few months later the Charles Allen Smith Memorial Monument was placed in front of the library over the objections of the Philadelphia Art Jury. While the Art Jury disliked the clumsy statue of a young sailor on a rusticated plinth, neighborhood sentiment prevailed in placing this memorial to a local resident who died at the Battle of Vera Cruz in 1914.³¹

William Rau's official photographs of the McPherson Square Branch show a stately building at the top of a long series of stairs and terraces. A variety of neighborhood children are shown sitting and standing on the stairs, with a row of modest attached houses just visible in the background. Two women who are probably the branch librarians stand on the top step in front of the door. For the interior view, a variety of young patrons are posed reading at tables or perusing the shelves while the librarians are stationed at the central desk under the dome. Three photographs and a plan of McPherson Square Branch also were published in the February 1920 issue of *Architectural Forum*. The main floor plan indicates the dual use of the rear ell space as a lecture room and children's reading room. A small side entrance pavilion provided direct

²⁶ Free Library of Philadelphia, *Nineteenth Annual Report* (1914), 12, Appendix H.

²⁷ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (15 April 1915), 51.

²⁸ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (29 November 1915), 54.

²⁹ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (29 November 1915), 54.

³⁰ Free Library of Philadelphia, Carnegie Fund Committee Meeting Minutes, (5 October 1917), 83.

³¹ "Kensington Unveils Smith Monument," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, 5 August 1917, 7.

access to this rear space without passing through the front vestibule and turnstiles at the desk under the dome.

In the decades since its construction the McPherson Square branch has continued to serve neighborhood library patrons with few substantial changes in form or detailing. Interior appointments such as the charging desk, shelving and patron tables have been changed over the years, as well as the floor covering and lighting. Most of the Free Library branches received new linoleum and fluorescent lighting during a major modernization campaign in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Adding computer facilities was the focus of another, more recent, series of widespread upgrades at the Free Library branches. In late 2008, many of the branch libraries, including a number of Carnegie-funded ones, are threatened with closure due to budget shortfalls for the City of Philadelphia. This unfortunate situation threatens to sever the long standing links between this struggling neighborhood and the branch outreach mission of the Free Library.

PART II. ARCHITECTURAL INFORMATION

A. General Statement:

1. Architectural character: The McPherson Square Branch library is an early-twentieth century Neoclassical structure with a symmetrical Palladian villa form, a formal axial entrance through a columned portico, and Classical detailing such as front pediment, shallow dome on an octagonal drum, Ionic capitals, and round arch windows. The library stands one-story high on a raised basement. It is basically T-shaped in plan with a shallow front portico. The main entrance faces down the hill of McPherson Square Park toward the corner of Indiana Avenue, F Street, and Kensington Avenue. The rectangular ell extends from the center of the rear façade. The walls are brick covered with stucco and many coats of pale yellow paint. The cornice and door surround are rendered in contrasting dark brown terra cotta.

2. Condition of fabric: Fair/Good

B. Description of Exterior:

1. Overall dimensions: The front, or main block, of this T-plan building is seven bays wide and three bays deep (approximately ninety-nine by thirty-one feet). The rear ell is three bays wide and four bays deep (approximately twenty-nine by fifty-one feet). The window openings are all closely spaced with shared trim that creates the visual appearance of an arcade on the façades.

2. Foundation: The McPherson Square Branch has an approximately three foot high masonry foundation with a sloping water table. The foundation is painted yellow so the original material is not visible.

3. Walls: McPherson Square's walls are brick covered with stucco painted pale yellow. The walls are smooth and unornamented except for a frieze along the top and recessed spandrel panels under each window opening. On the main block of the library the frieze contains floral medallions spaced over each window opening; it is empty on the rear ell. The spandrel panels are set between pilaster extensions of the round arch window frames. The spandrels are a series of recessed squares under the larger windows on the front façade of the main block and at the center of the secondary façades. For the slightly narrower openings the spandrels are more rectangular.

4. Structural system, framing: McPherson Square Branch library appears to have load bearing brick walls supported on a stone foundation. The large trusses used to support the roof and span the open reading room spaces are hidden by the plaster ceiling. Monumental columns help support the dome.

5. Main entry pavilion: The main entrance is indicated by a tall temple front portico projecting from the center third of the main façade. Patrons approach this formal entrance up a series of stairs and terraces constructed of a mix of brick and concrete. The entrance stairs are white marble and flanked by low walls. The pair of cast iron urns that originally stood on these walls is no longer extant. Much of the library's Neoclassical decoration is focused here. The pediment is empty except for a small oval window at the center. The thick cornices with rows of dentils are executed in dark brown glazed terra cotta. The frieze above the colonnade contains the carved words "THE FREE LIBRARY OF PHILADELPHIA – MC PHERSON SQUARE BRANCH." The carving is painted dark brown and stands out clearly against the pale yellow paint on the stucco frieze. The portico is supported by six monumental columns. The two corner columns are square and plain except for a dark brown terra cotta Doric capital. These columns match the pilasters behind them at the corners of the entrance pavilion. The four center columns are constructed of stuccoed brick, painted pale yellow, and topped with fanciful Corinthian capitals executed in polychrome terra cotta. Green volutes sit above bands of egg and dart and bead motif executed in shades of brown and tan. Below is another wider band of decoration filled with a repeating raised motif of palmettes also in shades of brown terra cotta.

"Lecture Room" entrance: A low flat-roofed entry pavilion is tucked into the northwest corner at the intersection of the main block and rear ell. The approach to this modest entrance is a concrete walkway and one low concrete step. This entrance allows direct access to a stair landing that leads to either the rear ell or the basement. The walls of this pavilion are stuccoed brick painted pale yellow. There is a dark brown terra cotta cornice above the simple door and window openings with a section of plain wall above.

6. Chimney: One tall square brick chimney is located at the junction of the main block and the ell, on the northwest. This chimney is stuccoed, has a simple cornice cap, and was connected to the coal burning boiler in the basement.

7. Openings

a. Doorways and Doors: The main entry has a pair of glazed metal frame doors that replaced the original wood panel ones. The original security door – a wood panel pocket door – is still extant. The top of the opening has been altered for installation of a corrugated metal roll-down security door. An elaborate polychrome terra cotta overdoor is still intact. The overdoor is a semicircle of thick molding sitting on a matching cornice. The large flat sections of molding are done in green terra cotta, with layers of Classical decoration such as egg and dart, beading, pearl molding, and fluting executed in tan or blue terra cotta. A pair of high relief female figures recline on the top of the semicircle in front of folds of drapery and flank a large oval console. The console is now blank, but the surface looks like it has been repaired and the original design removed. Although compatible with the Classical motifs in their pose and drapery, the figures are fully clothed and wear expressions and hairstyles that seem contemporary to the design of the library. The side entrance has pair of simple wood panel doors that appear to be original. There is also a partially subterranean door for direct basement access under the side entrance.

b. Windows: The typical window at the McPherson Square Branch is an eight over eight wood sash with a round arch upper sash. Metal security grilles have been placed over the exterior of all the window openings. Each window is framed with thick multi-layered molding. The round arch portion at the top of the windows springs from a pilaster with a Doric capital that continues below the opening to the water table, framing the spandrel panels and visually creating an arcade on the façade. On the front façade these groups of three windows are equal in size; on the side facades of the main block and the rear of the ell the center window is slightly larger than the other two. Each side of the rear ell has a similar set of four round arch windows with wide molding.

There are rectangular basement windows at ground level on the main façade only (historic photographs indicate that originally there were basement windows on the other façades that have been filled in). There is a vertical rectangular window opening next to the side entrance doorway. In addition, McPherson Square has a small louvered oval window at the front portico and each gable end pediment. These windows have a molding with applied “keystone” decoration.

8. Roof: McPherson Square Branch has a cross gable roof with a dome at the crossing. The low saucer dome is sheathed with ribbed copper and sits on an octagonal drum. The top of the dome has a glazed oculus opening. The gable roof is now sheathed with replacement composite shingles. Historic photographs indicate that the original roof covering was mission tiles. There was also originally a decorative balustrade around the dome drum. This branch has a box cornice and pediment gable ends with dentils and thick moldings executed in dark brown terra cotta.

C. Description of Interior:

1. Floor plans: McPherson Square Branch library has a mainly T-shaped plan with a main block, rear ell, and projecting front entry pavilion. The main library spaces have high ceilings and minimal interior partitions. The entrance pavilion creates a rectangular vestibule leading to domed desk area at the center of the main reading room. Originally

low shelves served to demarcate different departments within the library (children's, reference) while still allowing personnel at the central desk to see the entire space. Some private work spaces have been created by walls approximately seven feet high in the east side of the main room. The original circulation pattern of patrons entering through the vestibule and walking around the central charging desk to enter and exit is still in use although the original desk, rails, gates and other fixtures have been replaced.

McPherson Square Branch has a full basement with spaces that include staff kitchen, lunchroom, bathrooms, offices, boiler room, meeting rooms, and storage. Original features on this level include wood cabinets in the kitchen/lunchroom and metal Doric columns in the meeting room.

2. Stairway: There is an open well dogleg stair with a half pace landing in the side entrance pavilion on the west side of the ell. This stair provides access between the basement and main floor. The handrail is on the open well side of the stair and sits on a plaster half wall. There are modern non-skid plastic treads on the wood stair. The stairway walls have a raised panel wood wainscot approximately three feet high.

A wall-mounted metal ladder is located in a narrow shaft and provides access from the basement to the roof.

3. Flooring: The floors are now covered by modern carpet inside the reading rooms and asphalt tile squares around the central desk. Originally the wood floors were visible.

4. Wall and ceiling finish: The interior of the entrance vestibule has plaster walls with two marble plaques dated 1916 that commemorate the funding donated by Andrew Carnegie and the land provided by the City of Philadelphia for the McPherson Square Branch library. There is a modern acoustic tile drop ceiling in the entrance vestibule with recessed lighting above the plaques.

Inside the main library spaces the plaster walls and ceiling are painted pale pink or ivory with salmon accents. The walls are plain except for a long plaster cornice over each group of window openings. The ceiling is a shallow barrel vault. Historic exterior photographs indicate that there may have originally been small skylight openings at the center of each wing.

5. Openings:

a. Doorways and doors: At the entrance vestibule wall in the main reading room there are three openings. The center doorway is set in a shallow plaster round arch niche. The thick wood doorframe is topped by an unornamented triangular pediment. A fixed transom has curving loop mullions. There is a pair of doors here with glazing in the top half. A modern glass enclosure creates an additional vestibule that projects into the central room. Flanking this opening are smaller round arch openings without doors that lead to small alcoves in the entrance pavilion. The east alcove has been incorporated into the added partitioned office space.

There are three round arch cased openings between the main room and ell. The monumental arch at the center serves as a passage. The smaller flanking openings help share natural light from the central dome with the rear ell but are blocked at floor level by furniture. The plan published in *Architectural Forum* and the early interior photograph by William Rau both show that this arrangement is historic, with low shelves located in the bottom of these openings.

b. Windows: The large round arch window openings are set directly into the plaster walls above the bookshelves. The oculus at the center of the dome is eight-sided and glazed with clear glass. It has a web-like pattern, with thicker muntins radiating from the center and two octagonal sets of thinner muntins.

6. Decorative features and trim: Painted wood bookshelves line the outer walls approximately ten feet high up to the bottom of the windows. These are similar to the originals and have adjustable shelves. This arrangement was typical for the Philadelphia branch libraries and allowed maximum use of wall space for shelves while still allowing for considerable natural light.

The central dome is supported by four monumental Corinthian columns, as well as four engaged columns at the front and rear walls. The columns are painted a salmon color with a pale pink plaster capitals. The capital is a modified Corinthian form with an eight-sided cap, volutes, and a row of floral ornament (perhaps daisies or poppies) below the usual acanthus leaves. The dome drum entablature has rows of molding, dentils, and an unornamented frieze.

7. Mechanical equipment:

a. Heating, air conditioning, ventilation: It is likely that the original boiler system has been replaced. Historic photographs indicate metal grilles directly below the windows at the top of the book shelves as recommended by the Carnegie Fund Committee in 1905. These openings have been covered and newer heating registers are incorporated into the shelving.

b. Lighting: Historic photographs indicate Colonial Revival metal chandeliers with round globes hanging from the center of the dome and each reading room wing.³² These electric chandeliers had eight arms arranged in a spoke-like fashion around a central urn. In addition, sconces with one upward and one downward round globe (a combination gas and electric fixture) were mounted along the top edge of the outer wall book shelves. Many of the original branch library light fixtures were replaced with modern fluorescent ones during mid-twentieth-century renovations. Currently the modern ceiling fixtures consist of can-like downlights arranged in a group of three at the dome and hanging individually from the barrel vault ceilings in the wings. A pair of original cast iron light standards flanking the exterior entrance is still extant.

³² Interior photograph published in Free Library of Philadelphia *Annual Report*, 1917.

c. Plumbing: The library would have been built with basic bathroom and kitchen facilities, which have now been upgraded.

D. Site: McPherson Square branch library sits at the center of a city park landscaped with mature trees and formal axial paths that create a geometric pattern of circles and triangles inscribed in a square when viewed from the air. The park is bounded by East Indiana Avenue, E Street, F Street, and East Clearfield Street. The library faces the southeast corner at the intersection of East Indiana, F Street, and Kensington Avenue. The ground slopes downward at this side of the park and the library sits on the hill up a series of staircases and terraces. At the opposite corner on the northwest side of the park, the terrain is nearly level with the surrounding streets. The immediate neighborhood is primarily residential and densely developed with modest two-story rowhouses. Kensington Avenue cuts diagonally across the street grid here and is a low-rise commercial thoroughfare running underneath elevated train tracks.

PART III. SOURCES OF INFORMATION

A. Architectural Drawings: A pastel sketch dated 1913 and signed by Wilson Eyre shows the McPherson Square Branch library as a cruciform-plan domed structure in the center of the park. As built, the library is similar but modified in plan to be closer to the T-shape favored for Philadelphia's branch libraries in this period. See "Proposed Improvements to McPherson Square," in the Wilson Eyre Collection, Architectural Archives of the University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, PA. A main floor plan was published in the February 1920 issue of *Architectural Forum*, Plate 23.

B. Early Views: One exterior and one interior view of the branch by local photographer William Rau photographs were published in the Free Library of Philadelphia Annual Report (1917). Three exterior photographs were published in the February 1920 issue of *Architectural Forum*, Plates 22 and 23.

C. Bibliography

The records of the Free Library of Philadelphia are located at the Central Library on Vine Street. The *Annual Reports* are located in the Municipal Reference Division, Cities P53-1154; and the Carnegie Fund Committee Minute Books are located in the Director's Vault (access by special permission).

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PART IV: PROJECT INFORMATION

The documentation of the McPherson Square Branch Library was undertaken by the Historic American Buildings Survey (HABS) of the Heritage Documentation Programs of the National Park Service, Richard O'Connor, Chief, during summer 2007 as part of a larger initiative to record the Carnegie Funded branch libraries of the Free Library of Philadelphia. The project is sponsored by HABS in cooperation with the Preservation Alliance for Greater Philadelphia, John A. Gallery, director; and the Free Library of Philadelphia, William J. Fleming, Administrative Services Director, and made possible through a Congressional appropriation for recording in Southeastern Pennsylvania. The historical reports were prepared by Lisa P. Davidson and Catherine C. Lavoie. Large-format photography was undertaken for HABS by Joseph Elliott.